



## **Testimony Regarding the Governor's Proposed Budget for the Department of Children and Families**

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Appropriations

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Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and the esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Children and Families for FY 18 and FY 19. I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. My name is Lauren Ruth, and I am the Youth Policy Fellow for Connecticut Voices for Children. I coordinate our research concerning vulnerable youth.

When the state removes children from their parents due to concerns about maltreatment, the state has not only a moral but a legal responsibility to fund the services these vulnerable children need to live safer, more successful lives and to help combat the trauma that these children have endured. We urge you to consider this special relationship between the state and the children in DCF's care. These children can only rely on the state of Connecticut for care and protection.

Given that child abuse and neglect has risen since 2015 from a rate of 8.32 substantiated instances per 1000 reports to a rate of 9.66 instances, it is of utmost importance to protect the services that help prevent abuse and neglect and to protect the services that provide for children who are victims of abuse and neglect.<sup>1</sup> We hope that you will maintain the funding that helps DCF on their path to meeting their core goals of protecting the children in care from repeat maltreatment, stabilizing families, timely investigations, and meeting the needs of children in care.

This year, the Governor has asked agencies to help balance the budget by making deep cuts to the services they provide. His budget proposal, however, also recommends additional funding to the Department of Children and Families to help provide for the needs of some of Connecticut's most vulnerable children. These recommendations include increasing funding for DCF's differential response system, increasing funding for child abuse and neglect intervention programs, increasing funding for family violence outreach and counseling, and increasing funding for Community Kidcare programs like the Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services and cognitive behavioral therapies.

These are many of the programs that DCF determined as necessary to fulfill its core duties to the children and youth in their care<sup>2</sup>. Those duties include decreasing rates of children who repeatedly experience abuse or neglect, decreasing rates of children who are able to be reunified with their families have to be taken away from their families again, ensuring that investigations regarding allegations of abuse and neglect begin promptly, improving case plans and ensuring that plans are appropriate to meet the needs of the children, meeting the physical and mental health needs of children in care.

I draw this connection to highlight the purpose of the services funded in this budget. Dollars for the differential response system helps to make sure that investigations of abuse begin within a critical time frame. Dollars for family counseling helps to make sure that children don't have to re-experience the trauma of being taken away from the people they know and love. Dollars for Community Kidcare helps to ensure that traumatized children in the midst of mental health crises get the help they need before a crisis escalates into potentially harmful behaviors and situations. Funding for these programs makes a difference. It can make these children who have every disadvantage in life safe, healthy, and strong, and it can put them on the path of becoming fully self-sufficient.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding the DCF budget.

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the Connecticut Children's Report Card. Available at <https://app.resultsscorecard.com/Scorecard/Embed/23317>.

<sup>2</sup>Connecticut General Assembly. Office of Legislative Research. *Summary of the Revised Juan F. Consent Decree Exit Plan*. By Katherine Dwyer and Rachel Della Pietra. 13 Jan. 2017  
[https://www.cga.ct.gov/kid/related/20170126\\_January%2026,%202017%20Committee%20Meeting%20Handouts/OLR%20Juan%20F%20Summary.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/kid/related/20170126_January%2026,%202017%20Committee%20Meeting%20Handouts/OLR%20Juan%20F%20Summary.pdf).